



ten years on the edge
VERTIGO

Issue 11 May '03
BILL WILLINGHAM BRYAN TALBOT
SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

"...one of the hottest series of the year..." - WIZARD

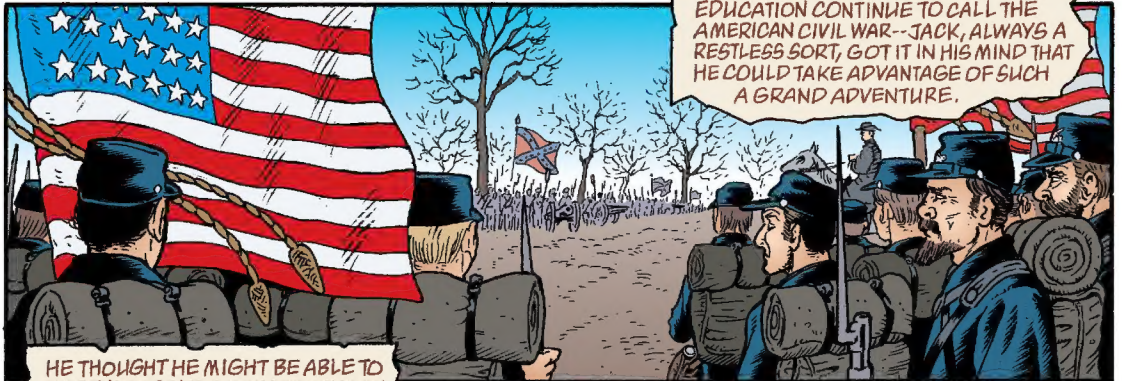
FABLES



NOW MAYBE THIS STORY IS TRUE AND MAYBE IT AIN'T, BUT IT'S ABOUT CRAFTY OLD JACK OF THE TALES, WHO WAS A TRICKY FELLOW IN THE OLD WORLD AND CONTINUED TO BE SO WHEN HE FOLLOWED US OVER TO THIS COUNTRY.

The American JACK TALES

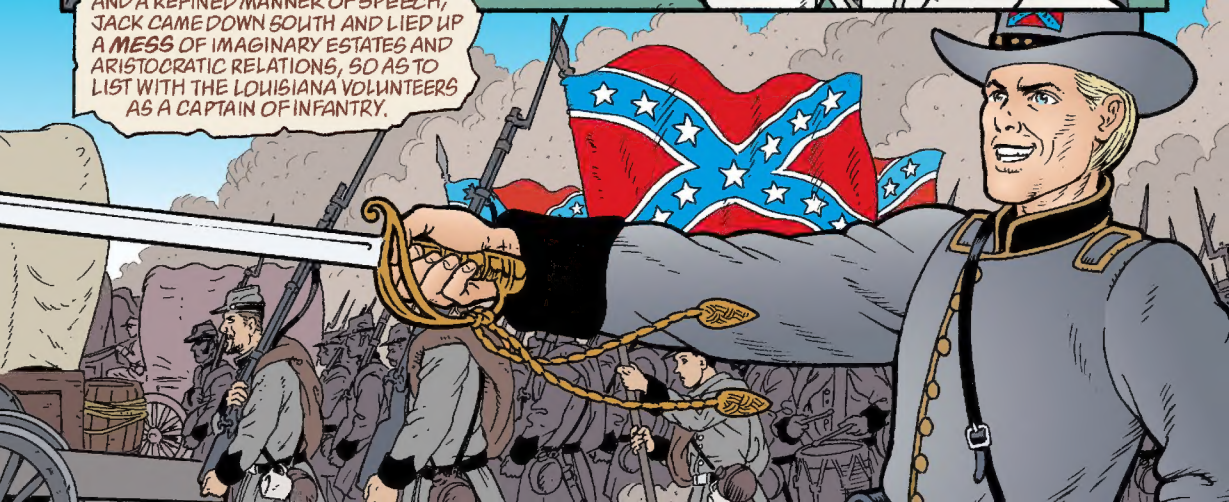
WHEN THE WAR OF YANKEE AGGRESSION BROKE OUT--WHICH THOSE OF LOW EDUCATION CONTINUE TO CALL THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR--JACK, ALWAYS A RESTLESS SORT, GOT IT IN HIS MIND THAT HE COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SUCH A GRAND ADVENTURE.



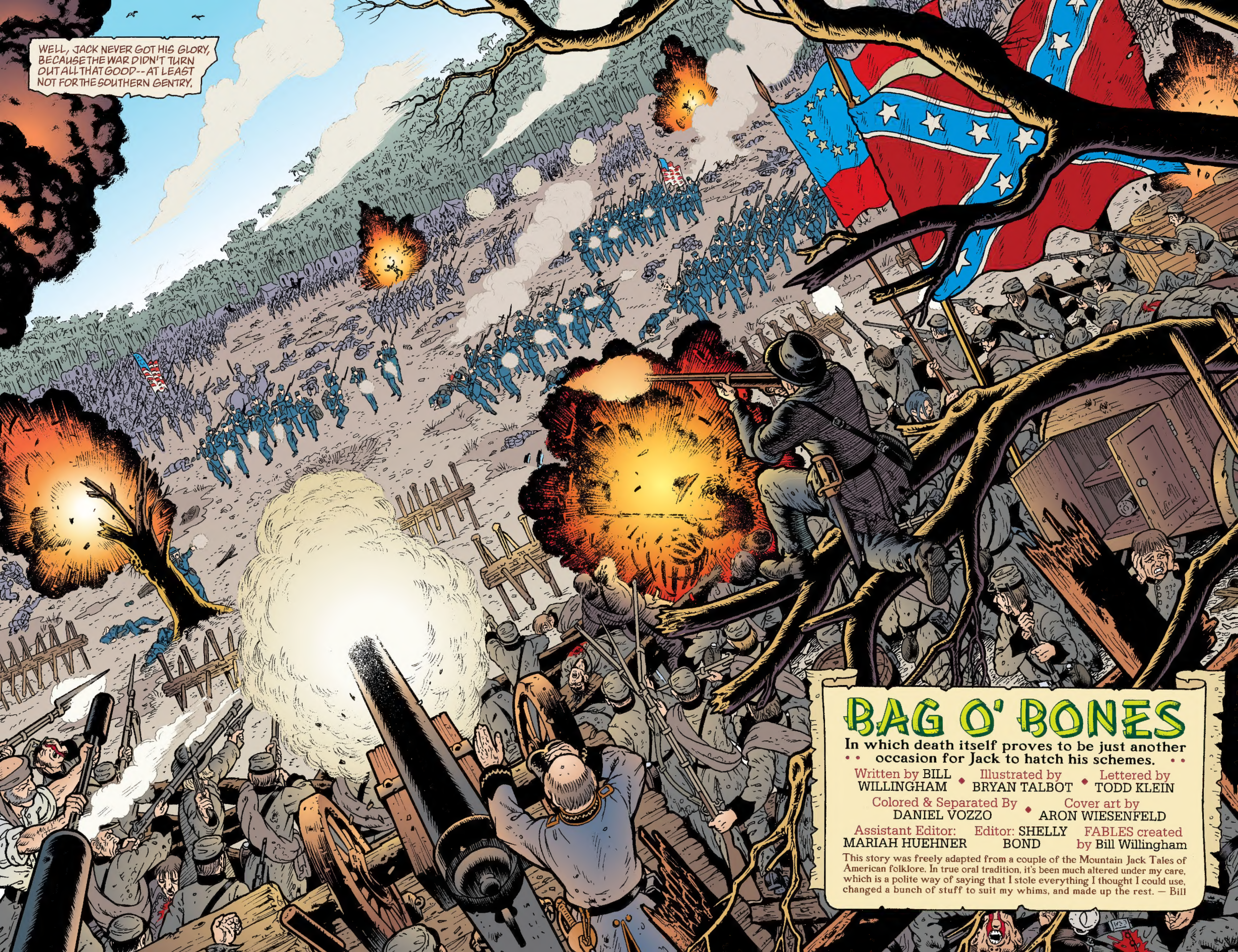
HE THOUGHT HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO MARRY HIMSELF A RICH SOUTHERN BELLE, IF ONLY HE EARNED SOME RENOWN IN BATTLE.



SO, PUTTING ON GENTLEMAN'S AIRS AND A REFINED MANNER OF SPEECH, JACK CAME DOWN SOUTH AND LIED UP A MESS OF IMAGINARY ESTATES AND ARISTOCRATIC RELATIONS, SO AS TO LIST WITH THE LOUISIANA VOLUNTEERS AS A CAPTAIN OF INFANTRY.



WELL, JACK NEVER GOT HIS GLORY,
BECAUSE THE WAR DIDN'T TURN
OUT ALL THAT GOOD-- AT LEAST
NOT FOR THE SOUTHERN GENTRY.



BAG O' BONES

In which death itself proves to be just another
•• occasion for Jack to hatch his schemes. ••

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This story was freely adapted from a couple of the Mountain Jack Tales of American folklore. In true oral tradition, it's been much altered under my care, which is a polite way of saying that I stole everything I thought I could use, changed a bunch of stuff to suit my whims, and made up the rest. — Bill



WHEN IT WAS CLEAR TO JACK THAT THE SOUTH WAS LOST, HE LIED SOME MORE ABOUT A DYING MOTHER IN ORDER TO BE GRANTED EARLY MUSTER.

GET OUT, YOU SCURRILOUS IMPOSTOR.

I EXPECT HIS BOSS COLONEL WAS MORE OF A MIND TO LET JACK GO BECAUSE HE WAS A DEFT HAND WITH A DECK OF CARDS, AND THE COLONEL WAS TIRED OF ALWAYS LOSING HIS WAGES TO HIM.

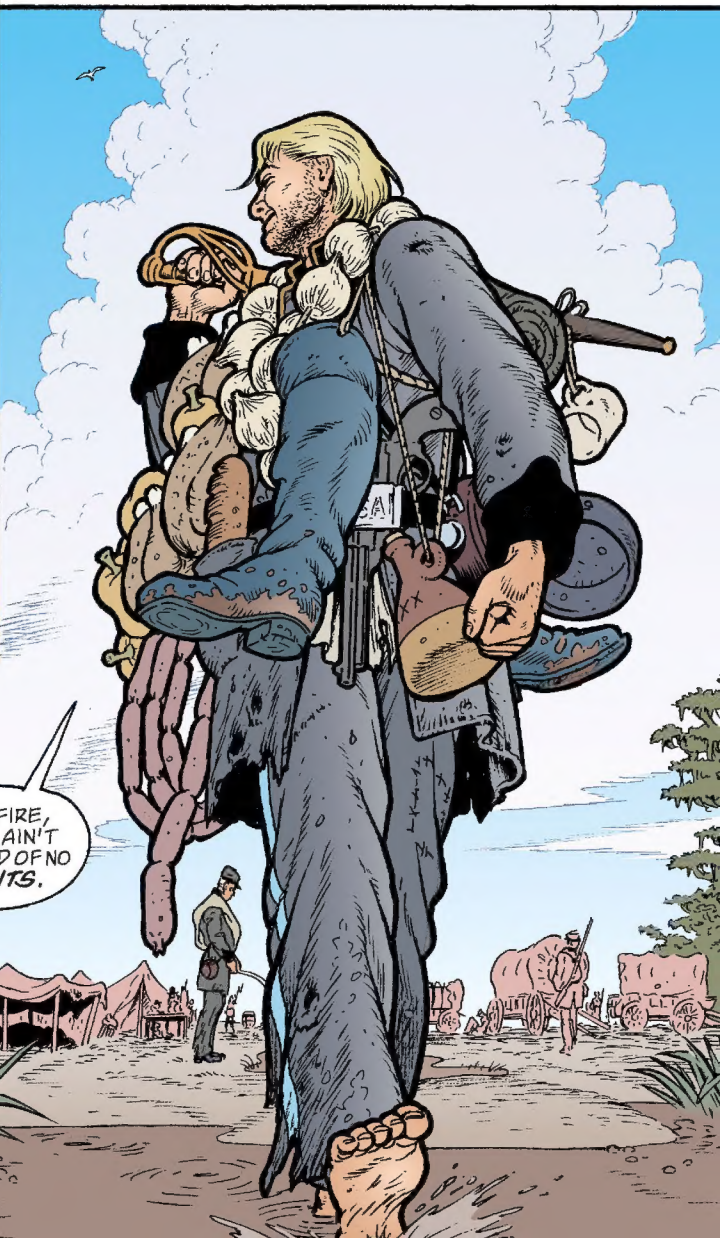
YOU UNS ALL TAKE CARE Y'SELF NOW.



TAKE THE ROAD, JACK. IT'S LONGER BUT SAFER.

DON'T CUT THROUGH YONDER SWAMP, BECAUSE IT'S WITCHED WITH ALL MANNER OF VILE CRITTER. MEBBE NICK SLICK HISSELF.

SHITFIRE, BOY, I AIN'T A-FEARD OF NO HAINTS.



MAYBE IT WAS TRUE THAT HE WASN'T AFRAID, OR MAYBE HE AVOIDED THE ROAD BECAUSE IT WAS EVEN **MORE DANGEROUS**. ALL MANNER OF CUTTHROAT BANDS, RENEGADE DESERTERS AND NE'ER-DO-WELLS ROAMED THE CRUMBLING SOUTH IN THOSE DAYS. WHATEVER THE REASON, JACK DID CUT ACROSS THE BAYOU.

WE LOVED EACH OTHER THEN, LORENA, MORE THAN WE E'ER DARED TO TELL...

WELL I'LL BE A SUCK-EGG MULE.

WHAT'S AN OLD COOT LIKE YOU-UNS DOING ALL ALONE AWAYS OUT HERE IN THE MIDDLE A' THE SWAMP?

PLAYING POKER ALL WITH MESELF, TO TAKE MY MIND OFF MY EMPTY BELLY.

SET Y'SELF DOWN A SPELL, YOUNG FELLER, AND PLAY A FEW HANDS WITH ME, SO MEBBE I CAN WIN ME SOME OF THEM TASTY VITTLES OFF YOU.

WHO KNOWS? MEBBE I'M THE KING A' OL' SIAM. AND GOT ME ALL SORTS OF TREASURE STASHED AWAY IN MY SACK HERE. YOU JESS BET WHAT YOU'VE A MIND TO AN' I'LL MATCH IT UP.

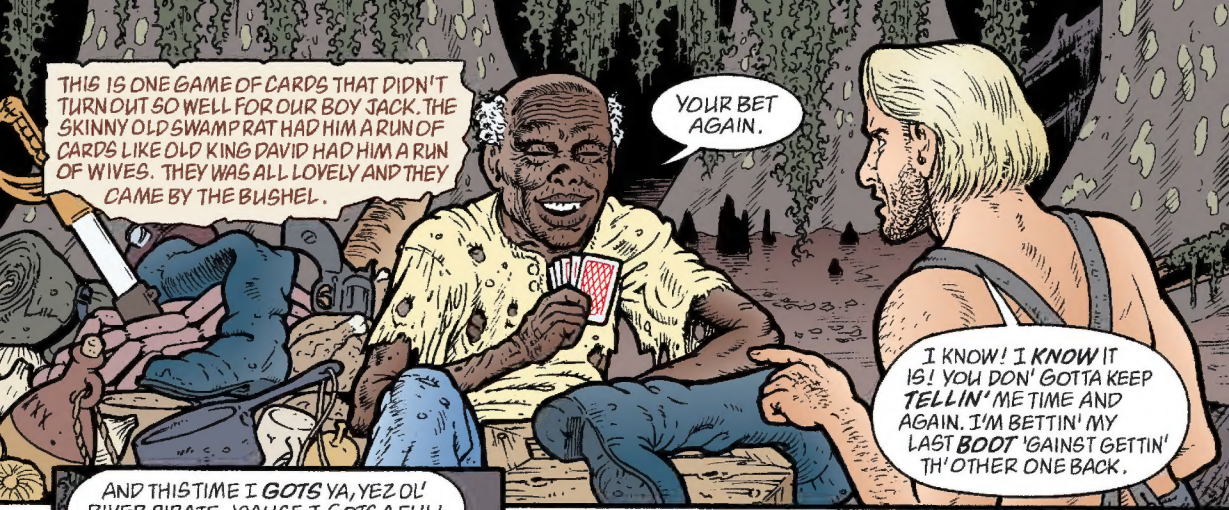
YOUR BET, YOUNG FELLA.

I RECKON I'LL OPEN WITH A MESS O' CRUSTY, FRESH-BAKED BREAD.

WELL, I SURELY LIKE A BIT OF POKER, BUT IT DON'T LOOK TO ME LIKE YOU-UNS GOT NARY A THING TO BET WITH.

WELL, I GUESS THAT'LL HAVE TO DO. DEAL THE CARDS.

I BET YOU SURE WANT TO WIN THAT, HUH?



THIS IS ONE GAME OF CARDS THAT DIDN'T TURN OUT SO WELL FOR OUR BOY JACK. THE SKINNY OLD SWAMP RAT HAD HIM A RUN OF CARDS LIKE OLD KING DAVID HAD HIM A RUN OF WIVES. THEY WAS ALL LOVELY AND THEY CAME BY THE BUSHEL.

YOUR BET AGAIN.

I KNOW! I KNOW IT IS! YOU DON' GOTTA KEEP TELLIN' ME TIME AND AGAIN. I'M BETTIN' MY LAST BOOT 'GAINST GETTIN' TH' OTHER ONE BACK.



AND THIS TIME I GOTS YA, YEZ OL' RIVER PIRATE, 'CAUSE I GOTS A FULL HOUSE, KING'S FULL OF TREYS.

DEM'S GOOD CARDS FOR SURE, BOY, BUT I 'SPECT FOUR LITTLE TWOS IS STILL JESS A MITE BETTER.



DANG IT! YEZ DONE CLEANED ME OUT, Y'OL BUZZARD!

YOU DON' WANT TA PLAY NO MORE?

HOW? AH YAIN'T GOT DOODLY-SQUAT CEPPIN MY PANTS, AND I AIN'T ABOUT TO GO CREEPIN' THROUGH THE SWAMP BUCK-ASS NEKKID!



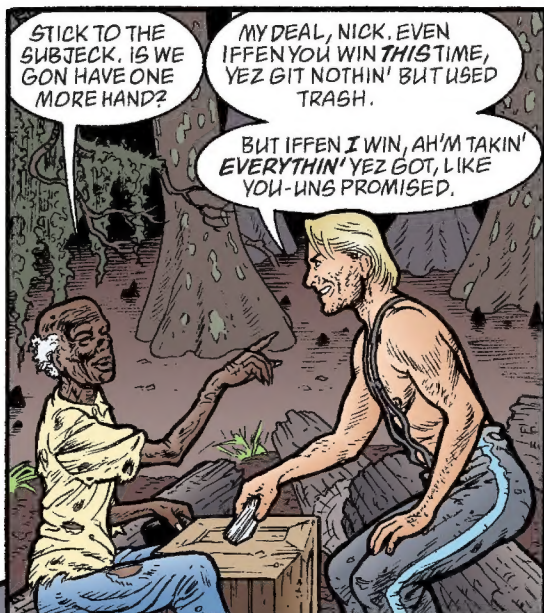
THAS NOT EVERYTHING YOU GOT, BOY. YOU STILL GOTS YOUR SOUL.

HOW 'BOUT IF WE PLAY ONE LASS HAND? YOUR SOUL 'GAINST EVERYTHING I HAVE HERE, MY STUFF AND YOUR STUFF COMBINED.

SO THASS WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT. I SHOULD'A RECOGNIZED YOU RIGHT OFF, MR. SLICK.

WHERE'S YOUR HORNS AND TAIL AND CLOVED HODFS?





STICK TO THE SUBJECT. IS WE GON HAVE ONE MORE HAND?

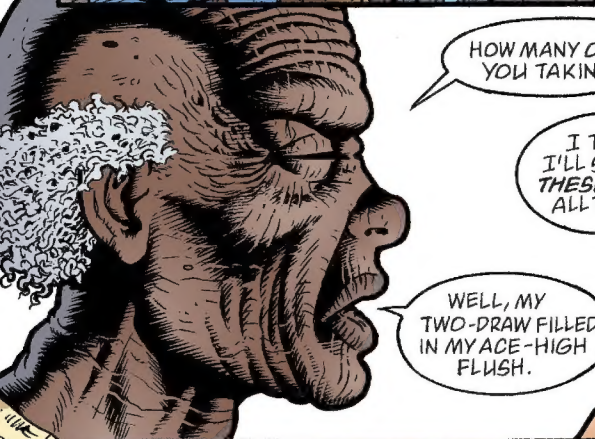
MY DEAL, NICK. EVEN IFFEN YOU WIN *THIS* TIME, YEZ GIT NOTHIN' BUT USED TRASH.

BUT IFFEN I WIN, AH'M TAKIN' *EVERYTHIN'* YEZ GOT, LIKE YOU-UNS PROMISED.



EVEN THAT MAGICAL BAG YEZ STUFFED ALL INTO.

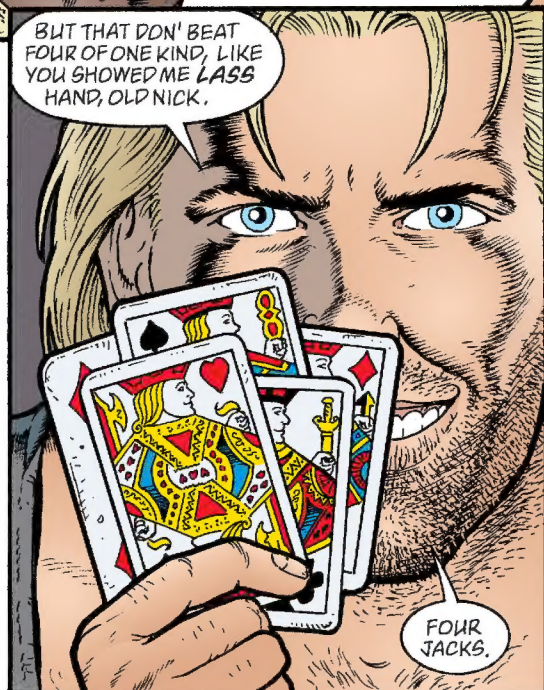
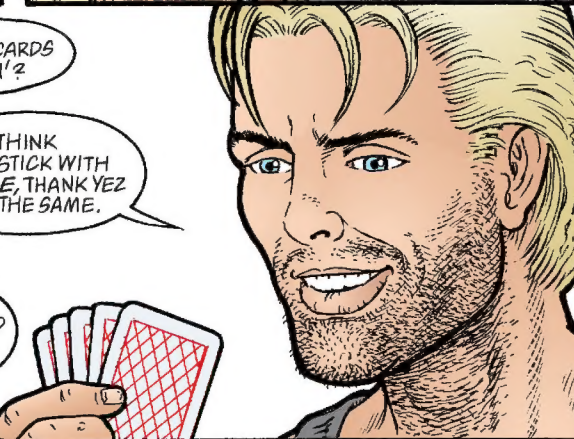
OH YEAH, NICKY, I FIGURED *THAT* MUCH OUT BY MY OWN SELF. I SEEN YOU STUFFIN' MORE AND MORE INTO YONDER SACK, BUT IT DIN'T GET NO FULLER.



HOW MANY CARDS YOU TAKIN'?

I THINK I'LL STICK WITH *THESE*, THANK YEZ ALL THE SAME.

WELL, MY TWO-DRAW FILLED IN MY ACE-HIGH FLUSH.



BUT THAT DON'T BEAT FOUR OF ONE KIND, LIKE YOU SHOWED ME *LASS* HAND, OLD NICK.

FOUR JACKS.



DANG IT! YOU *TRICKED* ME SOMEHOW!

NONSENSE. WHO COULD *TRICK* THE DEBBIL HIMSELF?

SO HOW DOES THIS WORK?



OLD NICK NEVER DID FIGURE OUT HOW HE WAS OUTFOXED. SOME SAY JACK WAS JUST A BETTER CHEATER.

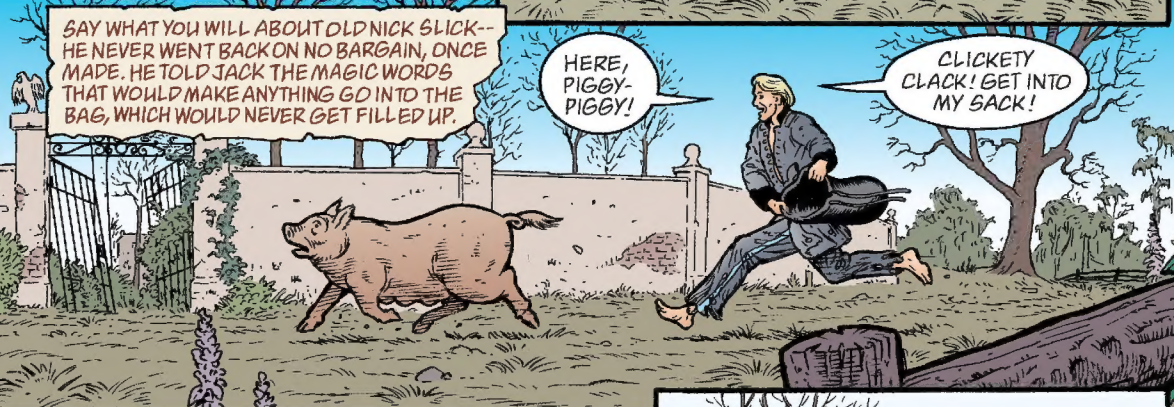
CAMPTOWN ♪
RACETRACK FIVE
MILES LONG--

OH! ♪
DA DO DAH
DAY! ♪



JACK WAS KNOWN TO BOAST, AT TIMES, WHEN HE WAS DEEP INTO HIS CUPS, THAT HE NEVER DID PICK UP A DECK OF CARDS WHERE HE COULDN'T DEAL HIMSELF ALL FOUR JACKS, WHENEVER HE LIKED.

GLORY BE!



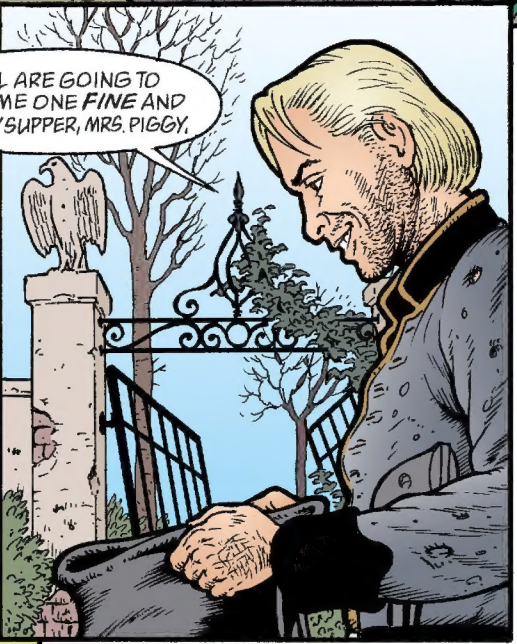
SAY WHAT YOU WILL ABOUT OLD NICK SLICK-- HE NEVER WENT BACK ON NO BARGAIN, ONCE MADE. HE TOLD JACK THE MAGIC WORDS THAT WOULD MAKE ANYTHING GO INTO THE BAG, WHICH WOULD NEVER GET FILLED UP.

HERE,
PIGGY-
PIGGY!

CLICKETY
CLACK! GET INTO
MY SACK!



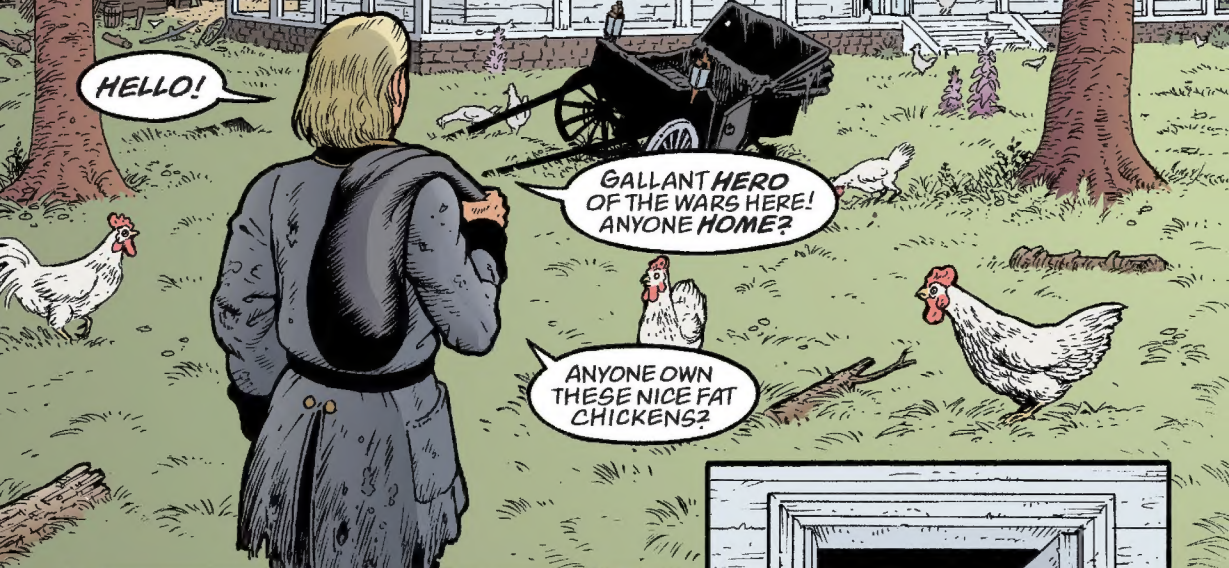
WHOOOOOOOSH!



Y'ALL ARE GOING TO
MAKE ME ONE FINE AND
FANCY SUPPER, MRS. PIGGY.



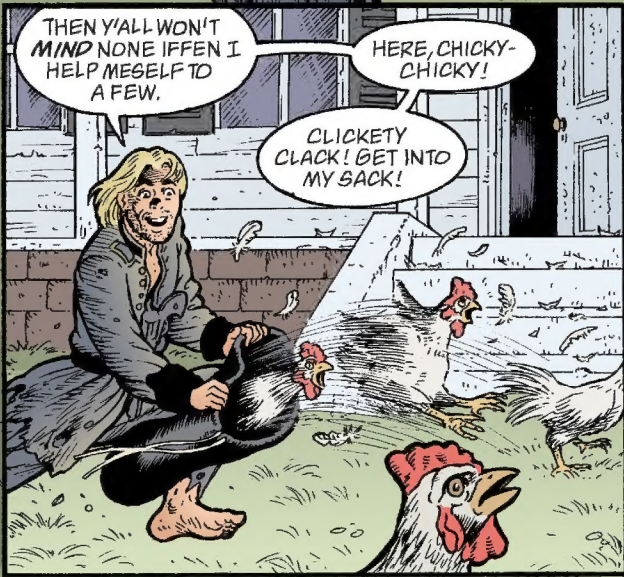
AN' MAYBE I'LL GET LUCKY TWICE AND FIND ME SOMEONE HERE TO COOK Y'UP FOR ME.



HELLO!

GALLANT HERO OF THE WARS HERE! ANYONE HOME?

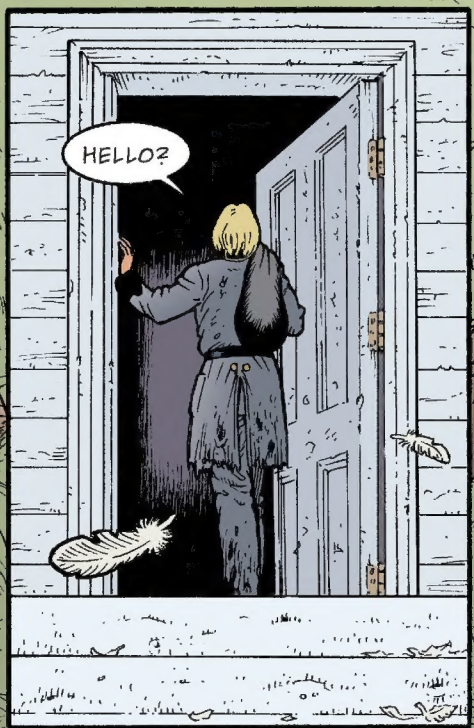
ANYONE OWN THESE NICE FAT CHICKENS?



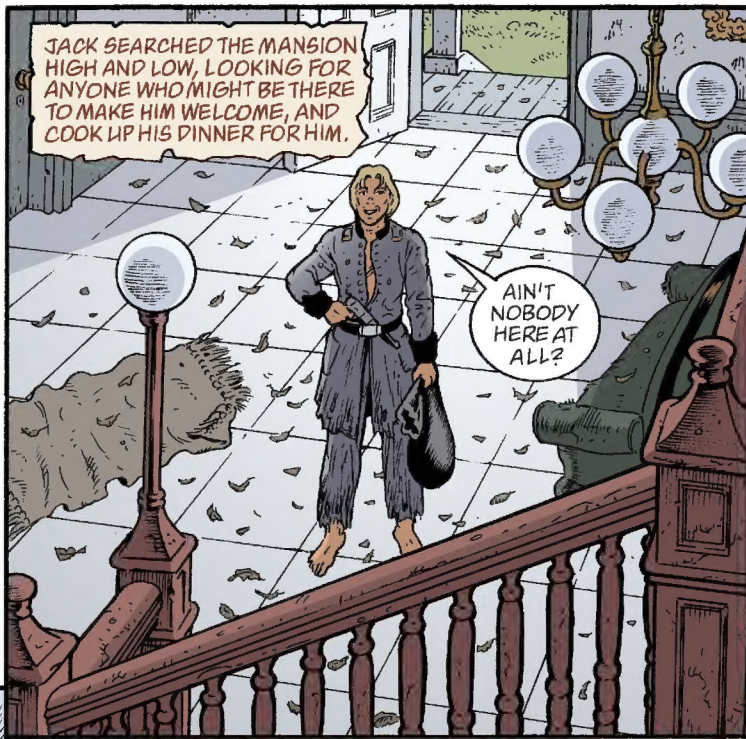
THEN Y'ALL WON'T MIND NONE IFFEN I HELP MESELF TO A FEW.

HERE, CHICKY-CHICKY!

CLICKETY CLACK! GET INTO MY SACK!



HELLO?



JACK SEARCHED THE MANSION HIGH AND LOW, LOOKING FOR ANYONE WHO MIGHT BE THERE TO MAKE HIM WELCOME, AND COOK UP HIS DINNER FOR HIM.

AIN'T NOBODY HERE AT ALL?



WITH ALL THE ROBBERS AND BRIGANDS ROAMING ABOUT, IT WAS DEEPLY ODD TO FIND A RICH ESTATE -- EVEN ONE AS RUN-DOWN AS THIS -- LEFT ALL ALONE.

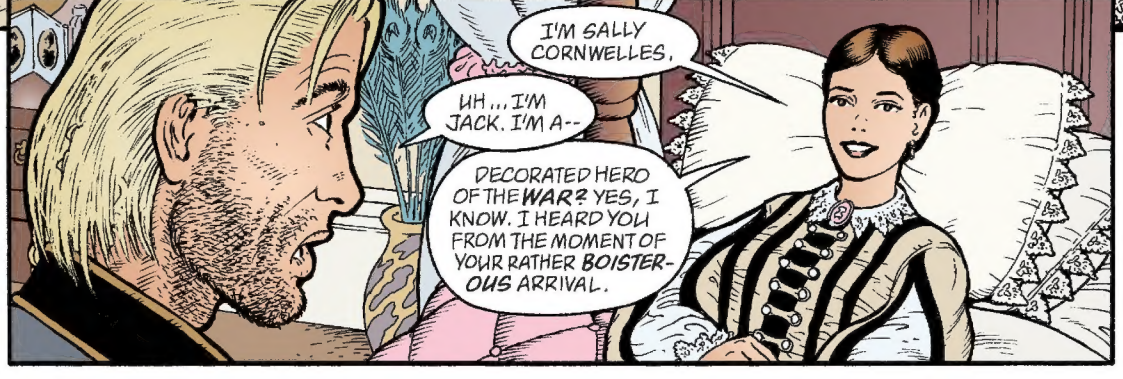
SHOULD I JESS MAKE MESELF AT HOME THEN?



UNTIL HE LOOKED IN THE LAST CORNER BEDROOM OF THE WESTERN WING.

HELLO?
OH MY.

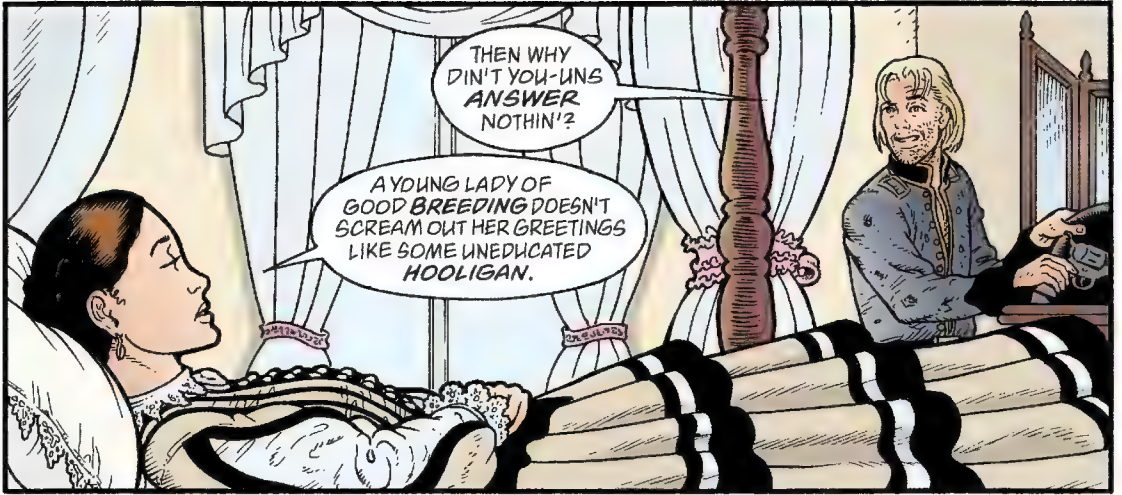
HELLO, SIR. WELCOME TO SARAMORE, MY FAMILY'S ANCESTRAL HOME.



I'M SALLY CORNWELLES.

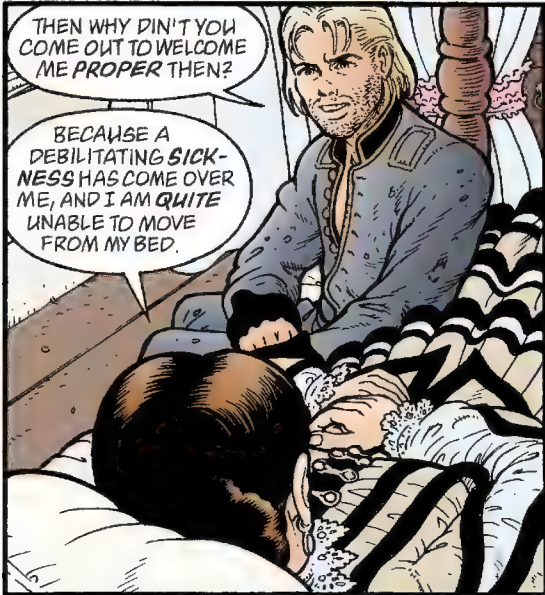
UH... I'M JACK. I'M A--

DECORATED HERO OF THE WAR? YES, I KNOW. I HEARD YOU FROM YOUR RATHER BOISTEROUS ARRIVAL.



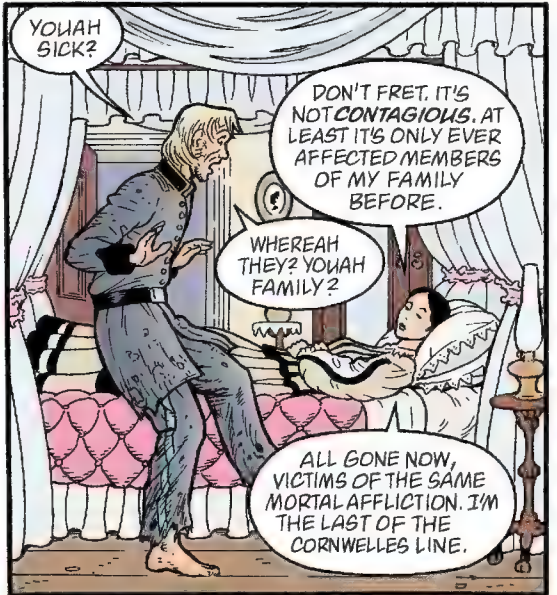
THEN WHY DINT YOU UNS ANSWER NOTHIN'?

A YOUNG LADY OF GOOD BREEDING DOESN'T SCREAM OUT HER GREETINGS LIKE SOME UNEDUCATED HOOLIGAN.



THEN WHY DINT YOU COME OUT TO WELCOME ME PROPER THEN?

BECAUSE A DEBILITATING SICKNESS HAS COME OVER ME, AND I AM QUITE UNABLE TO MOVE FROM MY BED.

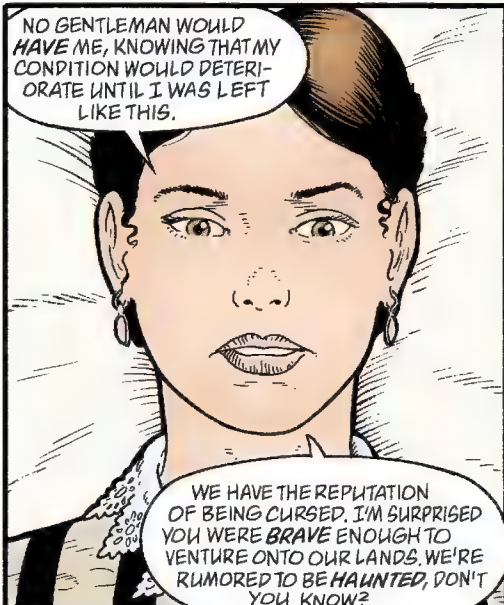


YOWAH SICK?

DONT FRET, IT'S NOT CONTAGIOUS. AT LEAST IT'S ONLY EVER AFFECTED MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY BEFORE.

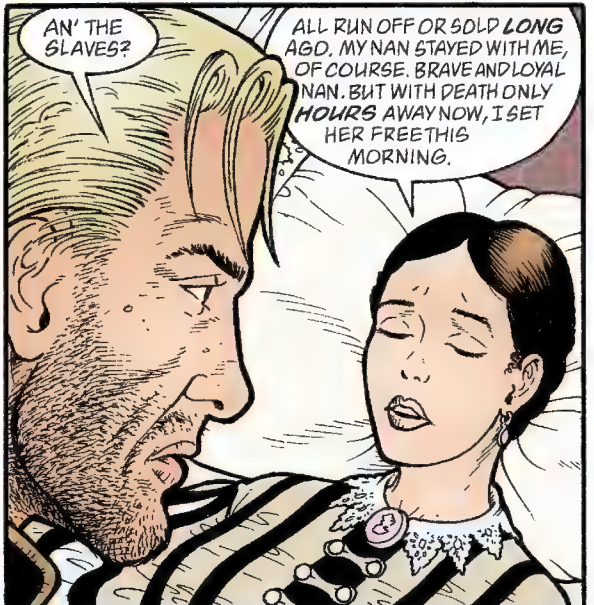
WHEREAH THEY? YOWAH FAMILY?

ALL GONE NOW, VICTIMS OF THE SAME MORTAL AFFLICTION. I'M THE LAST OF THE CORNWELLES LINE.



NO GENTLEMAN WOULD HAVE ME, KNOWING THAT MY CONDITION WOULD DETERIORATE UNTIL I WAS LEFT LIKE THIS.

WE HAVE THE REPUTATION OF BEING CURSED. I'M SURPRISED YOU WERE BRAVE ENOUGH TO VENTURE ONTO OUR LANDS. WE'RE RUMORED TO BE HAUNTED, DONT YOU KNOW?



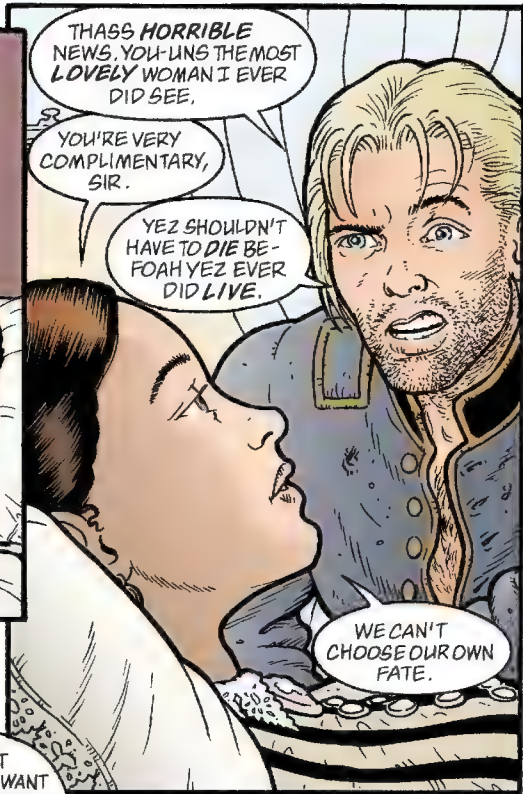
AN' THE SLAVES?

ALL RUN OFF OR SOLD LONG AGO. MY NAN STAYED WITH ME, OF COURSE. BRAVE AND LOYAL NAN. BUT WITH DEATH ONLY HOURS AWAY NOW, I SET HER FREE THIS MORNING.



YOU--UNNS DOOMED TO DIE?

WITHIN AN HOUR OR TWO, BEFORE NIGHTFALL MOST LIKELY, I'M RESIGNED TO IT NOW. THE LAST OF THE PAIN WENT AWAY DAYS AGO.

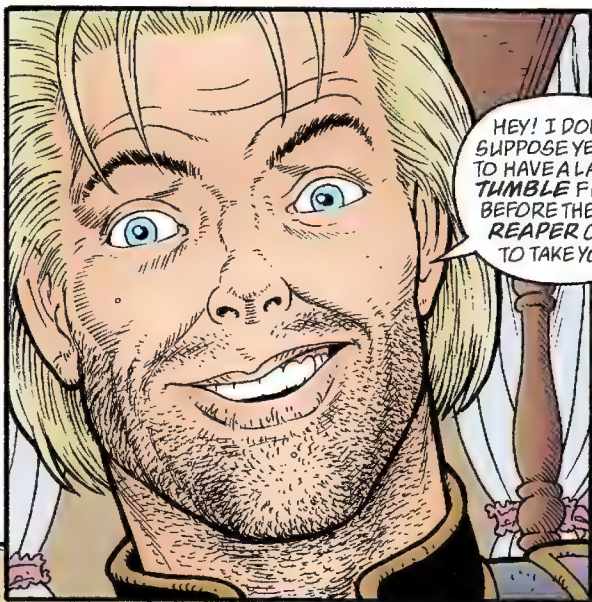


THASS HORRIBLE NEWS, YOU--UNNS THE MOST LOVELY WOMAN I EVER DID SEE.

YOU'RE VERY COMPLIMENTARY, SIR.

YEZ SHOULDN'T HAVE TO DIE BE-FOAH YEZ EVER DID LIVE.

WE CAN'T CHOOSE OUR OWN FATE.



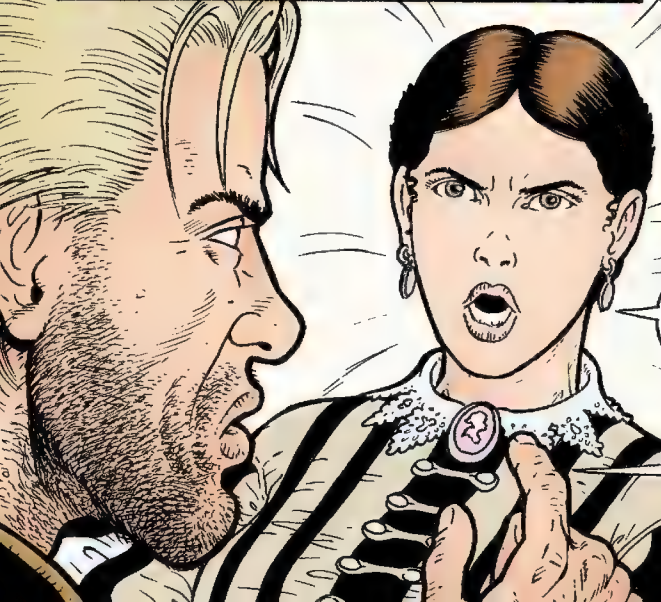
HEY! I DON'T SUPPOSE YEZ WANT TO HAVE A LAST TUMBLE FIRST? BEFORE THE REAPER COMES TO TAKE YOU?



I AIN'T HAD A WOMAN IN THREE YEARS-- NOT COUNTING WHORES OF COURSE-- AND SINCE YEZ DON' HAVE NO PLANS FOAH THE AFTAHNOON ...

EXCUSE ME?

ARE YOU SUGGESTING I INDULGE IN CARNAL CONGRESS WITH YOU? I INTEND TO GO VIRTUOUS TO MY LORD! YOU'RE NO GENTLEMAN, SIR!



AND LET ME ALSO POINT OUT THAT YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY NO SOUTHERN MAN, EITHER. YOUR COUNTERFEIT ACCENT COMES AND GOES MORE FREQUENTLY THAN A MARCH BREEZE.

OH...YEAH. I GUESS I GOT SO USED TO APING THE SPEECH OF YOU PEOPLE DOWN HERE, I FORGOT TO DROP IT ONCE I LEFT THE INFANTRY. AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "COUNTERFEIT"?



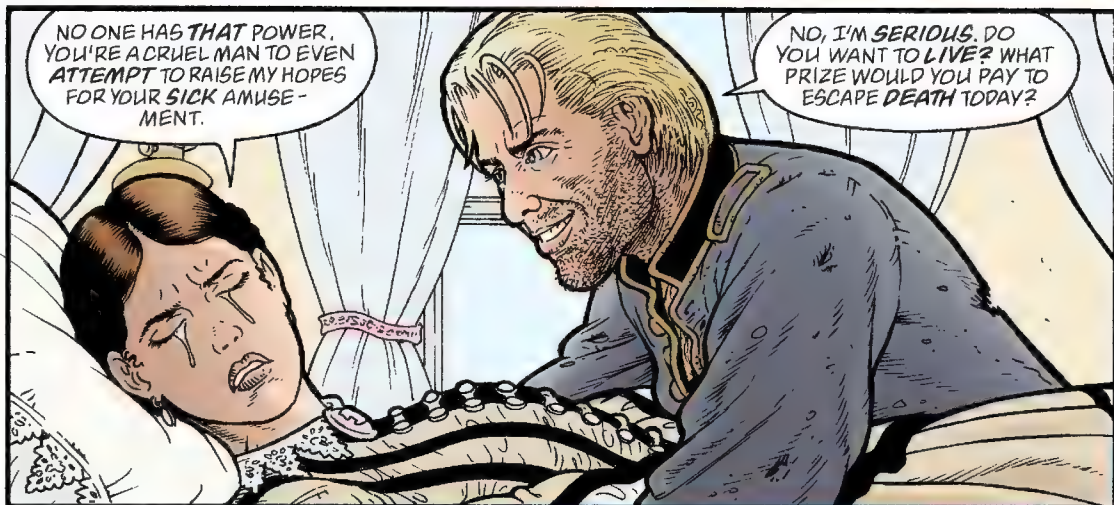
I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT **SEVERAL** LADIES OF NEW ORLEANS SOCIETY FOUND ME QUITE AUTHENTIC AND CHARMING.

AS AN AMUSING SIDESHOW, NO DOUBT, PLEASE BE GOOD ENOUGH TO LEAVE ME TO MY APPOINTMENT WITH THE DARK ANGEL.



HEY, THAT'S AN IDEA!

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IF I COULD KEEP OLD RATTLE BONES FROM CLAIMING YOU?



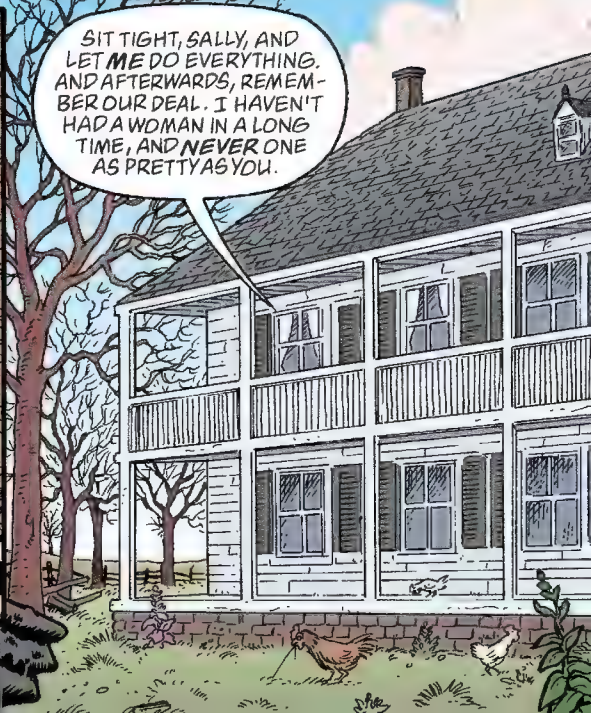
NO ONE HAS **THAT** POWER, YOU'RE A CRUEL MAN TO EVEN ATTEMPT TO RAISE MY HOPES FOR YOUR SICK AMUSEMENT.

NO, I'M **SERIOUS**. DO YOU WANT TO LIVE? WHAT PRIZE WOULD YOU PAY TO ESCAPE DEATH TODAY?



ANYTHING, OF COURSE, BUT--

DEAL!



SIT TIGHT, SALLY, AND LET **ME** DO EVERYTHING. AND AFTERWARDS, REMEMBER OUR DEAL. I HAVEN'T HAD A WOMAN IN A LONG TIME, AND **NEVER** ONE AS PRETTY AS YOU.





AH HA, MISTER RATTLE BONES! I'VE GOT YOU NOW!

EH?

CLICKETY CLACK! GET INTO MY SACK!



WHOOOOOSH!

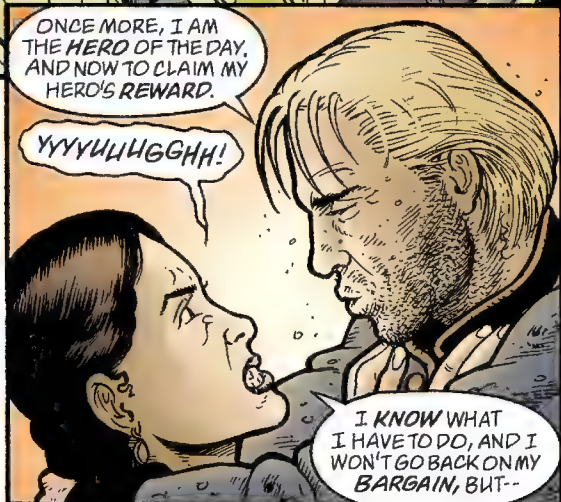


YOU DID IT, JACK! YOU CAPTURED DEATH HIMSELF!

AND, HEY--I CAN MOVE AGAIN. THE PARALYSIS IS GONE!

HOW DO YOU FEEL, GIRL?

PERFECT. WONDERFUL.



ONCE MORE, I AM THE HERO OF THE DAY. AND NOW TO CLAIM MY HERO'S REWARD.

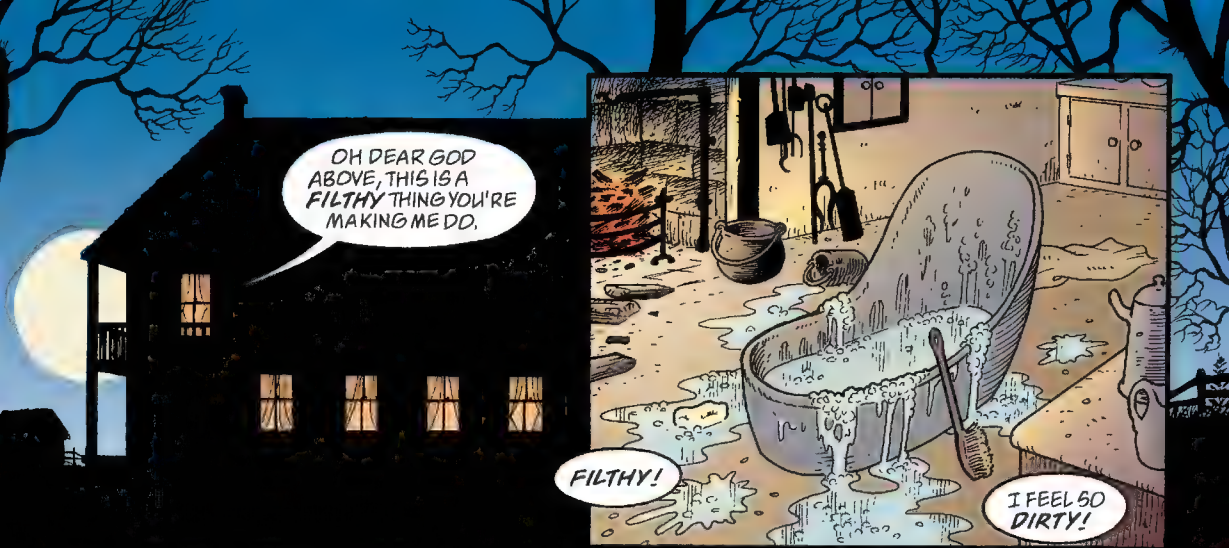
YYYYUUUHGHH!

I KNOW WHAT I HAVE TO DO, AND I WON'T GO BACK ON MY BARGAIN, BUT--

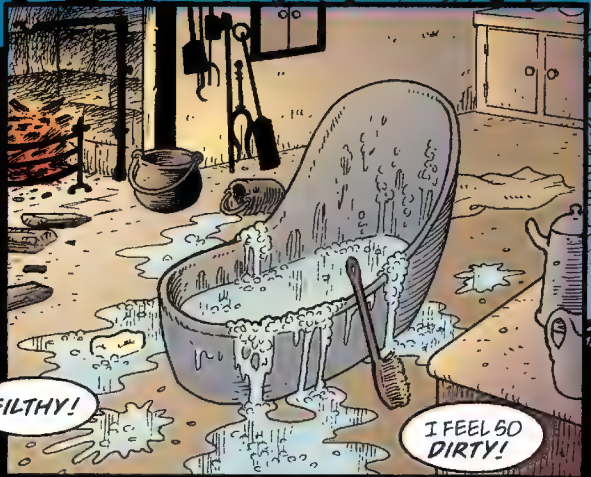


--IS THERE ANY POSSIBILITY YOU'D BE WILLING TO BATHE FIRST?

ANYTHING FOR YOU, MY SWEET.

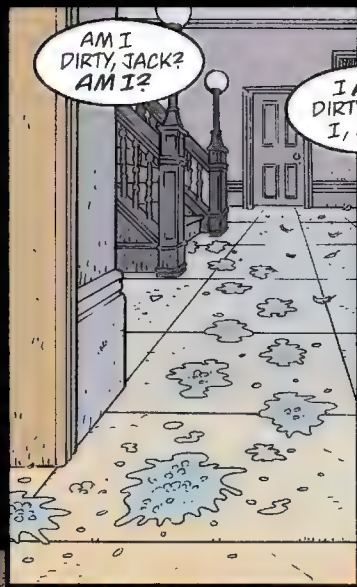


OH DEAR GOD ABOVE, THIS IS A FILTHY THING YOU'RE MAKING ME DO.



FILTHY!

I FEEL SO DIRTY!



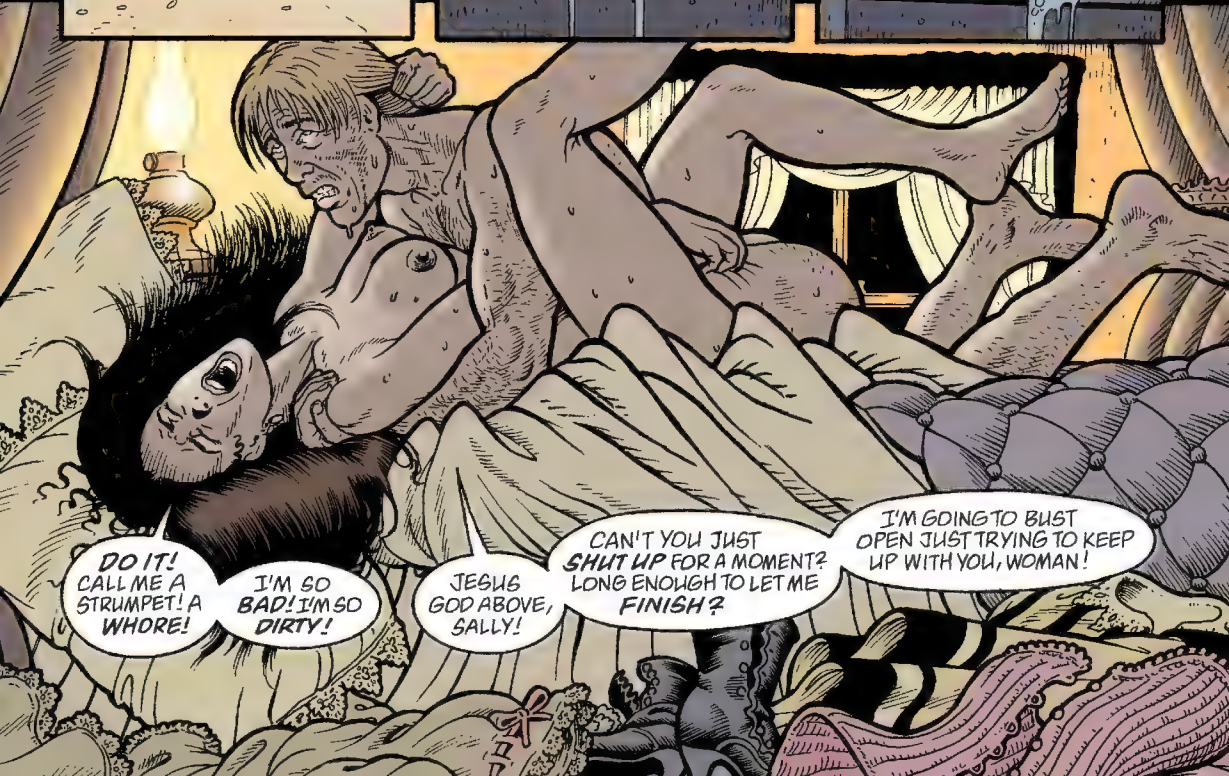
AM I DIRTY, JACK? AM I?



I AM DIRTY, AREN'T I, JACK?



CALL ME A DIRTY GIRL!




DO IT! CALL ME A STRUMPET! A WHORE!

I'M SO BAD! I'M SO DIRTY!

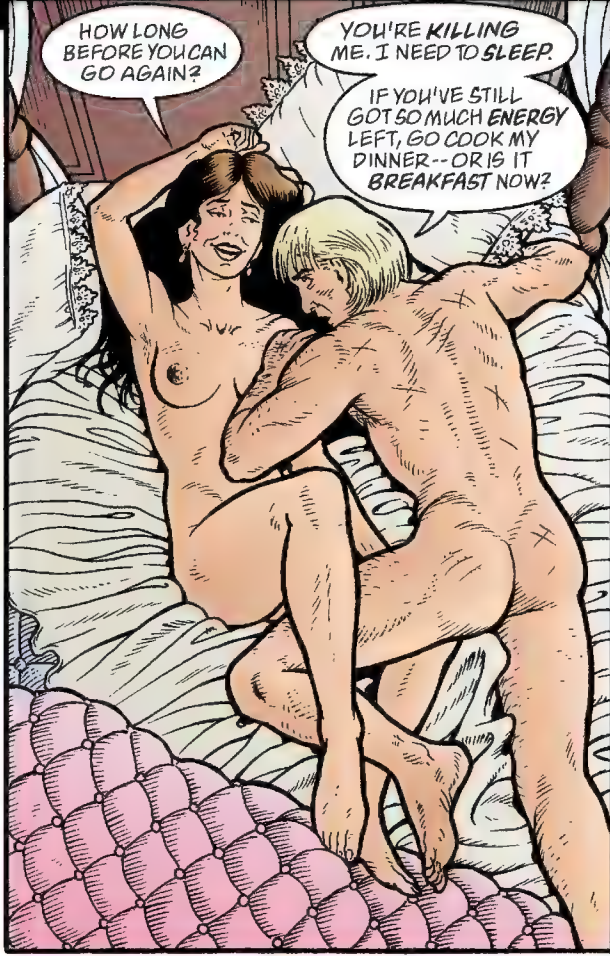
JESUS GOD ABOVE, SALLY!

CAN'T YOU JUST SHUT UP FOR A MOMENT? LONG ENOUGH TO LET ME FINISH?

I'M GOING TO BUST OPEN JUST TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH YOU, WOMAN!



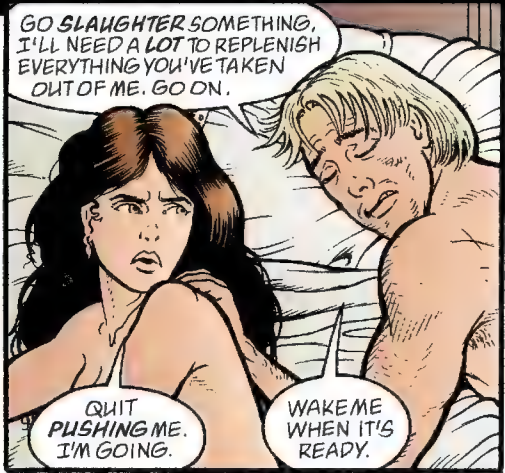
OH, JACK, WHAT
A GLORIOUS WORLD
YOU'VE OPENED UP
FOR ME.



HOW LONG
BEFORE YOU CAN
GO AGAIN?

YOU'RE KILLING
ME. I NEED TO SLEEP.

IF YOU'VE STILL
GOT SO MUCH ENERGY
LEFT, GO COOK MY
DINNER--OR IS IT
BREAKFAST NOW?



GO SLAUGHTER SOMETHING,
I'LL NEED A LOT TO REPLENISH
EVERYTHING YOU'VE TAKEN
OUT OF ME. GO ON.

QUIT
PUSHING ME.
I'M GOING.

WAKE ME
WHEN IT'S
READY.



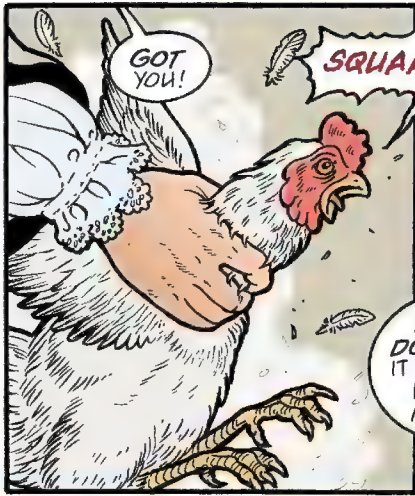
PIG.

OR
BEEF OR
CHICKEN.

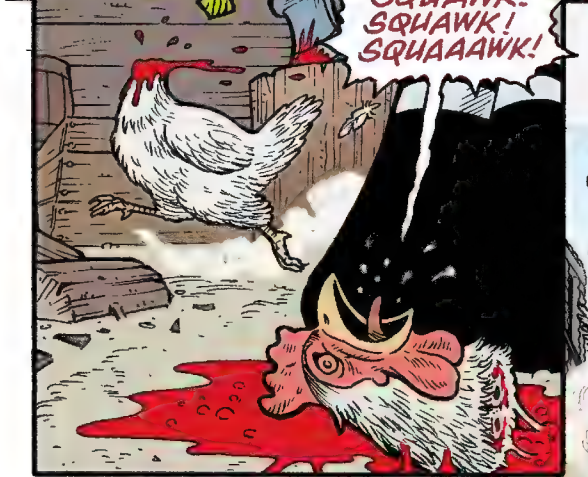
I'M NOT
PICKY, AS LONG
AS THERE'S
LOTS OF IT.

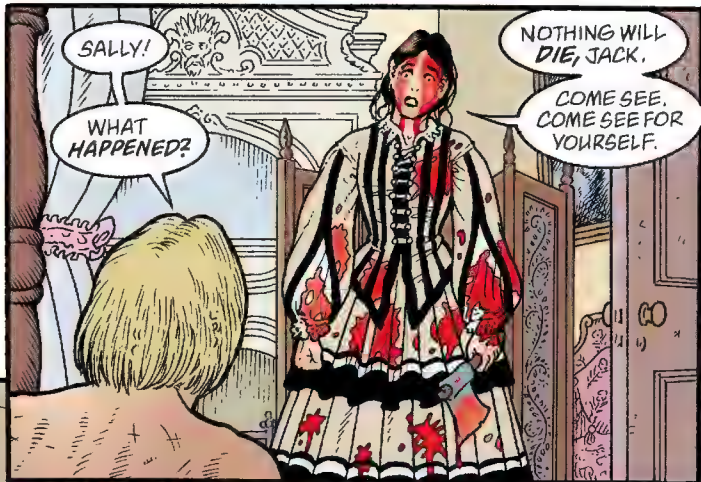
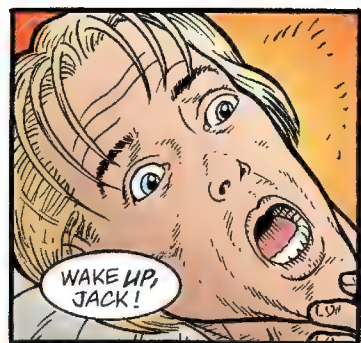
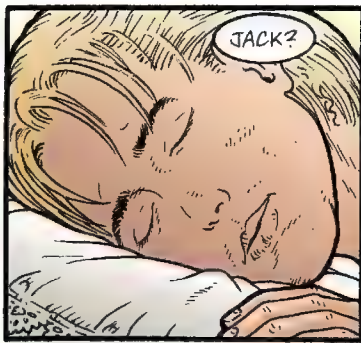


COME
HERE,
YOU!



SETTLE DOWN, GIRL. IT WILL ONLY HURT A MOMENT.







WHAT HAVE I DONE?

AND THAT'S NOT ALL, MY LOVE. WE HAVE VISITORS.



AND I THINK THEY'RE HERE TO SEE YOU.

JACK.

JAAAAACK.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, JACK?



WE WERE KILLED IN THE BATTLE THIS MORNING, JACK, BUT WE CAN'T DIE.

WHY HAVE YOU KEPT US FROM GOING TO OUR REWARD?

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?



THIS ISN'T MY FAULT, BOYS. NOT REALLY, I JUST WANTED TO SAVE THE GIRL.

LOOK AT HER. WOULDN'T YOU WANT TO KEEP HER OUT OF OLD RATTLE BONES' CLUTCHES, IF YOU COULD?

DON'T PUT THIS ON ME, JACK. I WAS READY TO GO TO MY SWEET SAVIOR'S BOSOM.

YOU'VE DESTROYED THE WAY OF THINGS, JACK.

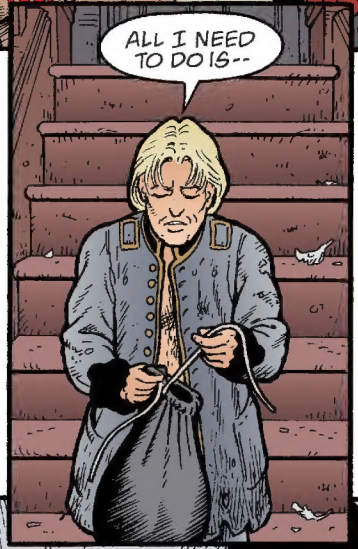


WAIT! I THINK I CAN STILL PUT IT RIGHT.

WAIT HERE! DON'T MOVE!



I CAN FIX THIS.



ALL I NEED TO DO IS--



COME OUT OF THERE, MISTER BONES.

HURRY, JACK. MORE THINGS ARE ARRIVING.



HORRIBLE THINGS.

WHOOOSH!

HOW DID YOU DO THAT TO ME?

NOW, DON'T GET ANGRY, SIR. I CAN EXPLAIN EVERYTHING.



ANGRY? WHY WOULD I BE ANGRY?

THAT WAS THE FIRST DAY OFF I'VE EVER HAD. IT WAS WONDERFUL! I FEEL SO RESTED!



THEN EVERYTHING'S OKAY BETWEEN US?

AS LONG AS YOU LET ME TAKE A DAY OFF IN YOUR MAGIC BAG ONCE EVERY YEAR OR SO. NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I HAVE SOME WORK TO CATCH UP ON.

BUT WHAT ABOUT ME? AM I TO BE TAKEN NOW TOO?



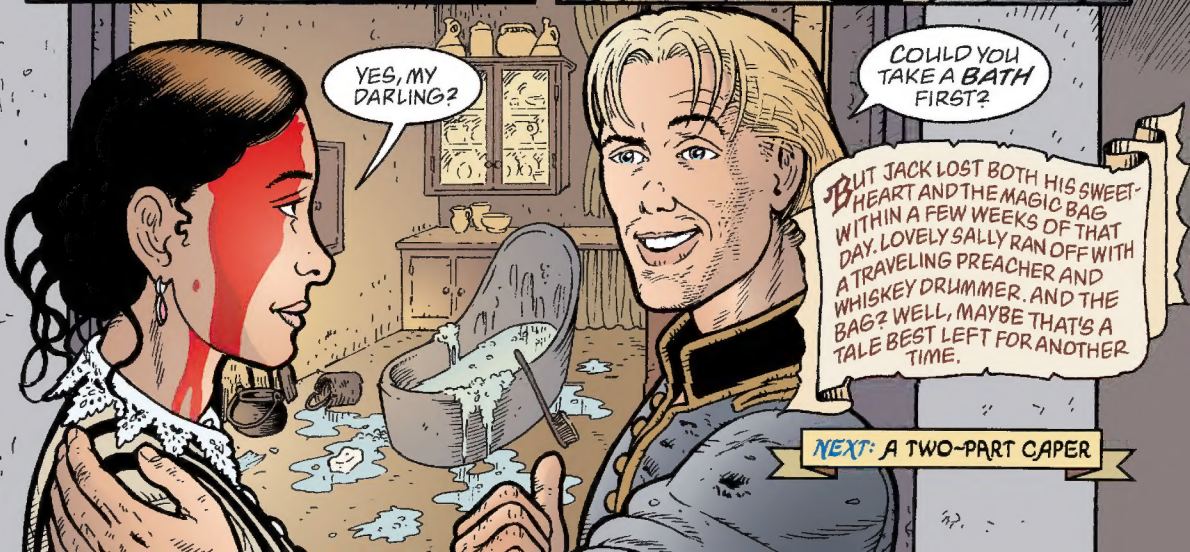
I'LL GIVE YOU ANOTHER YEAR TOGETHER. THAT'S THE BEST I CAN DO.



ONE YEAR. REMEMBER.

AND OH WHAT A LOVELY YEAR IT WILL BE! WON'T WE BE HAPPY, JACK MY LOVE?

UH... SURE, SWEETHEART. IT WILL BE GRAND. BUT ONLY--

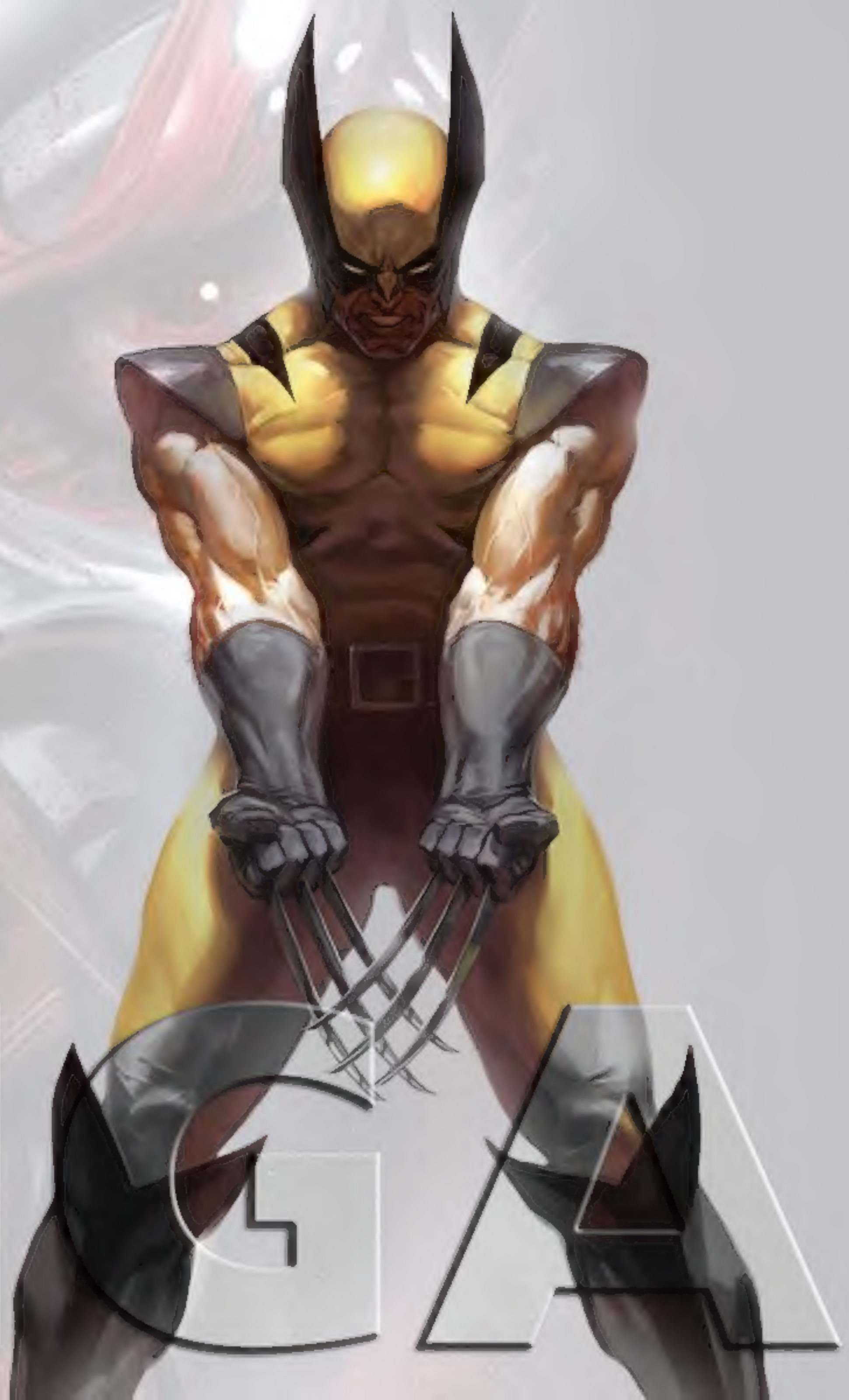


YES, MY DARLING?

COULD YOU TAKE A BATH FIRST?

BUT JACK LOST BOTH HIS SWEETHEART AND THE MAGIC BAG WITHIN A FEW WEEKS OF THAT DAY. LOVELY SALLY RAN OFF WITH A TRAVELING PREACHER AND WHISKEY DRUMMER. AND THE BAG? WELL, MAYBE THAT'S A TALE BEST LEFT FOR ANOTHER TIME.

NEXT: A TWO-PART CAPER



NATHAN